

ZOLTÁN SZILASSY

LEHEL VADON: *MASTERPIECES OF AMERICAN
DRAMA: AN ANTHOLOGY AND INTRODUCTION*

Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1994.

Two Volumes, Vol. I. 602 pp.; Vol. II. 576 pp.

Although a book-review should not also pose as a “list of contents” for the book it is trying to evaluate, in this case I feel inclined to do so. Lehel Vadon’s elegant, impressive, hardcover edition of the abovesaid—in fact, metaphorically speaking, fruitful and, practically speaking, juicy summary of his decades-taking philological and empathy-oriented searches and researches; the two volumes also designed and, author-by-author, introduced by him—features the following unforgettables: E. G. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*; Th. Wilder, *Our Town*; Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*; A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman*; *The Crucible*; T. Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*; *The Glass Menagerie*; E. Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Sam Shepard, *Buried Child*; LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Dutchman*.

This long list of major American playwrights, and their “No.1.” plays, selected for their getting anthologized for Hungarian Americanists (juniors or seniors, as they may be) raises an important question for me: is not the main title of this selection (Masterpieces of American Drama) a teeny bit misleading? Even if quite a number of experts maintain that American Drama—as such—began no sooner than with O’Neill, one still wonders whether “the Americanization of

American Drama”—using Péter Egri’s wording—had not begun a century and half ago?

On the other, somewhat “Hungarianized” hand, tributes must be paid to Lehel Vadon’s selection and his very helpful intros to these items, really masterpieces. The more so, because Vadon’s way of selecting corresponds not only with possible, particular usability of his having selected American dramatic texts (and/or theatrical scenarios) for Hungarians, but quite reliable experts, abroad, seem to testify to his very choices! E.g.: with due consideration to O’Neill’s, T. Williams’, A. Miller’s certain plays being produced (on- /off-off/ Broadway and at university theatres).

Statistics (according to Anta Productions Project Listing; see, Educational Theatre Journal, Oct., 1970, U.S.A.) give preference to items of this selection: to these very plays, not only as classics, never to be forgotten, but also as “old-timers” not only to be “forgiven”, but given another chance!

Getting down to ‘brass-tacks’ and, of course, to Lehel Vadon’s choices: beside Shakespeare (20); O’Neill (10), Williams (11), Miller (8), and Albee (5) seem to have earned most of the productional reputation, from 1960 until 1970.

Another respect, from some of us, must be given to Vadon’s choices if, very possibly “Drama as Cultural Sign: American Dramatic Criticism, 1945—1978”, penned by C. W. E. Bigsby (American Quaterly, Vol. XXX./No. 3, p. 30. & passim)—has helped me to appreciate and re-appreciate things Lehel Vadon has been trying to suggest, namely: that there may be centuries’ and decades’ cultural heritage to wonder upon, but then there come years when one has to ponder. O’Neill, I am afraid,—and with due alteration of details—is the “American Shakespeare”, some Bible to re-interpret, some Homer to be re-read, some Victor Hugo, or Walt Whitman, or Allen Ginsberg to celebrate all these. The anthology testifies to this unique heritage as well as to its no less unique followers.